any great consistency or vigour. Nonetheless, much of the literature which survives about the 'Abbāsid movement before the Revolution is clearly partisan and much of it obviously tendentious; one does not need to be a particularly sceptical critic to accept that dreams which accurately foretell the 'Abbāsid Revolution are likely to be later inventions, but Lassner is correct to draw our attention to these as reflections of early 'Abbāsid apologetic.

Lassner also suggests that there was a second line of apologetic required to defend the accession of the Caliph al-Manṣūr against those who supported other candidates within the family, notably his uncle 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī, since al-Saffāḥ 'inexplicably chose his nondescript brother' as his heir. In fact, al-Manṣūr had as good a claim as any other member of the family and better than most (with the possible exception of al-Saffāḥ's retiring son Muḥammad, a figure not considered here). After all, al-Saffāḥ had inherited the mantle of leadership from his other brother, the martyred Ibrāhīm, and both during and after the Revolutionary wars al-Mansūr had proved himself determined and able and had built up a considerable body of support. For most Iraqi and Khurasani supporters of the 'Abbāsids, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī had simply ruled himself out by his open dependence on Syrian supporters of the Umayyads. Curiously, having made this assertion, Lassner rather leaves it in mid-air and little of the discussion later in the book concerns Manṣūrid, as opposed to more general 'Abbāsid propaganda.

After a general theoretical discussion, Lassner moves on to discussing three important issues in the history of the 'Abbāsid movement, the alleged testament of Abū Hāshim, the nature and chronology of contacts between the 'Abbāsids and their Khurasani supporters, and the origins of Abū Muslim. Lassner is certainly right, though hardly original, in pointing out that all these issues are highly problematic and that the source material is too varied to enable us to make any firm judgements. He also does a service in suggesting reasons for the emergence of many of the different views. But he extrapolates too far from this and goes on to claim that 'with the data currently available, it is improbable that anyone can write a detailed narrative history, let alone describe the larger story of the 'Abbāsid rise to power'. To take three notoriously problematic issues and then claim that this invalidates all accounts of the more general process is wholly unreasonable. The lawyers say that difficult cases make bad law; it may be that obscure and obfuscated events make bad historiography. As an approach to certain important but limited problems, Lassner's work is interesting; but as an investigation of the general historiography of the early 'Abbāsid period, it is fundamentally flawed.

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS HUGH KENNEDY

IAN RICHARD NETTON, *Allāh Transcendent. Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Theology and Cosmology* (Exeter Arabic and Islamic Studies, 5). Routledge, London and New York 1989. Pp. xiii + 383. Price: £40.

One of the most striking features of medieval Islamic philosophy is its metaphysical scheme in which theology and cosmology are closely linked. It is therefore surprising that this aspect of it has not yet been subjected to a

comprehensive study. This is what Netton has set out to do, and the result is remarkable in many ways.

The first part of the introduction deals with historical matters, such as the role of Alexandria, Ḥarrān and Gondēshāpūr in the transmission of Greek learning to the East. Some of Netton's assertions here could be called into question. For instance, there does not appear to be any close link between the *Theology of Aristotle* and the *Pure Good* on the one hand and the Alexandrian philosophical milieu on the other (p. 9). Netton also tends to overrate the importance of Gondēshāpūr in respect to philosophical (as opposed to medical) studies; it is certainly excessive to describe that city as 'Byzantine through and through' (p. 14), nor is there any evidence that Damascius and Simplicius taught there, although they may have done this at Ḥarrān.

After these preliminaries, Netton describes what he calls the Qur'ānic Creator Paradigm: the whole development of Islamic philosophy is viewed in terms of a gradual alienation from that paradigm. This is an interesting approach insofar as it makes it possible to take into account both the unquestionable insertion of Islamic philosophy into the religion of Allāh and its relative independence from it.

Chapter two describes al-Kindī's philosophical personality in terms of four 'faces' (Qur'ānic, Aristotelian, Muʿtazilite, and Neoplatonic). Netton rightly stresses the strain in his thought between divine transcendence and the idea of emanation which is inseparable from the Neoplatonic heritage (pp. 63–5). He also shows that al-Kindī does not yet seem to be fully aware of the implications of Greek philosophical ideas for the Islamic faith.

Chapter three is devoted to the 'Second Master', al-Fārābī. While noting that terms such as Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism do less than justice to the originality of al-Fārābī's system (p. 104), Netton maintains that the *Virtuous City* essentially belongs to the latter trend. This may well be so, but I feel that in saying so he tends to underrate the extent to which the Fārābian and the Neoplatonic universes differ, particularly the fact that al-Fārābī's emanationism is of a fundamentally different kind from Plotinus' one. The interest of this chapter also lies in that it reminds us of the often forgotten fact that some of the basic conceptions of the schoolmen, Aquinas among them, ultimately derive from al-Fārābī.

Netton rightly vindicates the importance of the Neoplatonic component in Ibn Sīnā's system, to which chapter four is devoted, although such labels, as in the case of al-Fārābī, are never fully adequate.

Chapter five deals with Ismāʿīlism (the main authors studied there are al-Nasafī, al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī) and chapter six with al-Suhrawardī and Ibn al-ʿArabī. In many ways, all these thinkers are very close to the *falāsifa* proper, but have traditionally been disregarded by specialists of that discipline as belonging to Sufism and Muslim sectarianism. Studying them side-by-side is often illuminating, and this is surely one of the most welcome innovations of Netton's. Ismāʿīlī cosmology is best understood in conjunction with al-Fārābī, combining as it does the two rival creeds of creationism and emanationism. As for al-Suhrawardī's light philosophy, it is at once a critique of Ibn Sīnā's rationalism and a development of his mystical tendencies.

As indicated in the sub-title, the main innovation of this book on the

theoretical level is the use of structuralism and semiotics. I must confess that I am not convinced that these methods significantly enhance our understanding of medieval Islamic philosophy. Perhaps this is due in part to Netton's manner of setting out his materials: each chapter is concluded by a 'structuralist section' (p. 70), a procedure which leaves the reader under the impression that the author is reiterating in structuralist jargon what has been expounded before in more conventional language. These sections mostly contain theoretical considerations which may be interesting as such but add little to the preceding discussion. Thus Netton says (p. 188): 'furthermore, as use of the Barthesian codes has highlighted, the internal structure of *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān* is massively infused with the mystical, symbolic, gnostic, and cosmic'; but surely this was pretty obvious without Barthesian codes. Elsewhere, his desire to find Piaget's 'basic structuralist ideas', wholeness, self-regulation, and transformation, in al-Fārābī's (p. 127) or al-Suhrawardī's (p. 290) systems leads him to use these terms in senses which would hardly have been recognized by Piaget himself. The same observation could be made with regard to 'intertextuality' which sometimes seems to mean little more than 'resemblance' or 'influence'. The structuralist approach, in short, has not really been worked into the analysis of the various systems envisaged, but remains as a kind of outward conceptual cloak. Netton denounces the 'hoary old tradition that elaborated and interpreted the doctrines and lore of one school purely in terms of a set of "influences" from a prior' (p. 243); to be sure, his book is not open to that kind of censure. The reservations expressed above are perhaps peripheral and affect the form more than the contents of a work for which all students of Islamic philosophy will be very grateful.

UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA CHARLES GENEQUAND

MANSOUR AJAMI, *The Alchemy of Glory. The Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism*, Washington DC, Three Continents Press 1988. Pp. xi + 153.

'Truthfulness' (*ṣidq*) versus 'untruthfulness' (*kadhib*) is one of the main issues of classical Arabic literary criticism. Professor Ajami, who in an earlier work, *The Neckveins of Winter*, traced critical attitudes to naturalness and artificiality in poetry, here turns his attention to the *kadhib*/*ṣidq* controversy, with the aim of providing a 'synthetic critical survey' (p. 2) of both critics and philosophers who expressed themselves on the subject.

In ten chapters he discusses almost all the main relevant texts, from the early fourth/tenth century Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's *ʿIyār al-shiʿr* to the seventh/thirteenth century Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājannī's *Minhāj al-bulaghāʾ wa-sirāj al-udabāʾ*. (The only notable absentee is Ibn Fāris's *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha wa-sunan al-ʿarab fī kalāmihā*.) He also refers to, and sometimes extensively summarizes, the recent scholarly studies of some of his texts. A useful appendix gives a glossary and index of literary and philosophical terms.

Professor Ajami's is undoubtedly the most comprehensive survey of this subject up till now, and as such it serves as a useful starting point for those wishing to familiarize themselves with classical Arabic thought and modern research on it. Where he allows himself to discuss his authors at some length, notably in the case of ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and Ḥāzim al-